

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, I come to the House floor today to express my concern over the Baku-Tiblisi-Ceyhan pipeline, which is designed to transport oil from the Caspian Sea. This pipeline has been in the planning stages for years, but this year ground was actually broken for the pipeline in Azerbaijan. The proponents of this pipeline have touted its numerous benefits in recent years, but last month an Amnesty International report identified major problems that I would like to address this evening.

Amnesty International's report, Human Rights on the Line, is a thorough and convincing look at how large oil companies put the business of oil over the lives of those that stand in the way of its delivery. The executive director of Amnesty International, Dr. William Shultz, recently blasted the consortium, led by British Petroleum, that is financing the pipeline.

He said, "While BP claims to be socially responsible as the leader of the BCT consortium, it has essentially encouraged the Turkish Government to sign away its ability to fully uphold human rights."

Mr. Speaker, in contractual agreements between companies and governments, human rights should not be negotiable.

In their report, Amnesty International cited five main areas of concern with the pipeline project. They argue that the contract signed between British Petroleum and the Turkish Government, known as the Host Government Agreement, places the business agreement above human rights, and this agreement will violate the principles of human rights in five ways.

First, a land grab by the Governments of Turkey, Georgia and Azerbaijan along the route of the pipeline. Over 30,000 people who live in villages and farmland along the path will be permanently displaced without their having any input into the decision or receiving any compensation.

Second, little to no enforcement of health and safety legislation in each of the three host countries for the workers and locals that work on and live near the pipeline.

Third, the serious risk to the human rights of any individuals that protest the pipeline's construction. If the local residents protest the construction, they are likely to be brutally suppressed.

Fourth, Mr. Speaker, all the water resources in the vicinity of the pipeline will be used for its construction. Local residents and their farms and livestock will face a severe water shortage as a result, and their water supply is also likely to be seriously polluted from the construction.

Fifth, the agreement that Turkey and British Petroleum signed actually creates an economic disincentive to uphold human rights. The text of the agreement states that Turkey has to pay compensation to British Petroleum for not meeting construction deadlines.

The Turkish Government would almost be forced to ignore the basic concerns of its population in order to meet deadlines set by the oil companies.

Mr. Speaker, I plan to bring the Amnesty International report on the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline to the attention of our Congress and our Caucus on Armenian Issues. We will ask the authors of the report to present their findings to the Armenian Caucus in the coming weeks.

This practice of sacrificing the things we hold dear for 10 to 20 years of oil cannot continue. How much of the environment are we willing to destroy? How many of our basic human rights will we continue to hand over to the oil companies?

Mr. Speaker, lastly, the U.S. Government, in my opinion, should certainly not provide any economic incentive for this pipeline until a thorough review of the human rights and ecological problems is completed.

GRANTING SALES TAX DEDUCTION ON FEDERAL TAX RETURNS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Tennessee (Mrs. BLACKBURN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. Speaker, in 1999 I began battling imposition of a State income tax in Tennessee. Our State spent 4 years debating the ability of government to levy new taxes and the meaning of tax fairness. The battle was long, and it engaged virtually every taxpayer in Tennessee. At the end of the day, those that supported the State income tax lost. Tennessee stood up and said enough is enough, and they rejected a massive tax increase.

Traveling through our beautiful State, I met people in city halls, people in coffee shops, and I gained tremendous appreciation for what those patriots must have felt when they dumped the tea into the Boston Harbor during the Boston Tea Party. I really continue to take heart in the way average citizens, people who have really never taken an interest in politics, the way they have become marching, sign-waving, horn-honking activists, and the way they have united against another tax increase.

With the defeat of a State income tax in Tennessee, I came to Washington prepared to work for legislation that would allow citizens of States without a State income tax the right to deduct the sales tax from their Federal income tax filings. Right now, if you pay State income taxes, you can deduct those payments on your Federal returns, but if you only pay sales tax, you cannot deduct it, and that is unfair.

The Nation's Tax Code effectively punishes States without an income tax, States like Tennessee, Texas, Florida, Washington, Wyoming and South Dakota.

Mr. Speaker, there are more than 53 million people that live in States that do not have a State income tax. That is nearly 20 percent of our entire population. I want to say that one more time. There are nearly 53 million people that live in States without a State income tax. That is nearly 20 percent of our entire population. And these people are being penalized every single year when they fill out their Federal income tax filing. All of these people have been or will be taxpayers, and they deserve tax fairness.

America's seniors would also be supportive of this effort. There are millions of seniors in this country. Many probably do not have a great deal of State income tax payments to deduct on their Federal returns, but they certainly have State sales tax payments. So the support is clear. There are millions of Americans in States across the Nation who want and deserve this deduction.

Mr. Speaker, I have made this a priority. I have worked very closely with the gentleman from Texas (Mr. BRADY), the gentlewoman from Wyoming (Mrs. CUBIN), the gentlewoman from Washington (Ms. DUNN), and our majority leader the gentleman from Texas (Mr. DELAY). I have testified before the Committee on Ways and Means on this issue, and I have taken every opportunity to talk to Members and work with Members on both sides of the aisle on this most important issue.

The sweat is paying off. Today the New York Times drew attention to this issue and pointed to this House's engagement on the effort. There have been articles in papers across Tennessee, Florida, Washington, and the list goes on and on. The word is spreading. We are closer than ever before to winning passage of a sales tax deduction, but the time is not here for celebration. It is time to put our noses to the grindstone and work to find the right vehicle for the sales tax deduction.

The momentum is building, and it is time for fairness for the people who live in States without a State income tax. They deserve this deduction, and it is time for them to have it.

GROWING CONCERNS ABOUT U.S. POLICY IN IRAQ

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. MCGOVERN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. MCGOVERN. Mr. Speaker, over the past few days and weeks, an increasing number of my constituents have contacted me to express serious questions and growing concerns about U.S. policy in Iraq. I, too, have questions, and I share their concerns.

For example, in the months since U.S. forces invaded Iraq, overthrew Saddam Hussein and his government, and gained control of the country, no weapons of mass destruction have been found, despite repeated assertions by

the Bush administration before the war that Iraq possessed large stockpiles of these weapons; not weapons programs, which is the terminology the administration now chooses to use, but weapons themselves.

On August 26, 2002, Vice President Cheney said, "Simply stated, there is no doubt that Saddam Hussein now has weapons of mass destruction."

Have we made any progress at all in finding those weapons? Have the dozens of Iraqi scientists interviewed by American intelligence officials provided any useful information? Is the administration still confident that weapons stockpiles will be found?

It is not enough to say, well, other people thought Iraq had weapons, too, because neither the Clinton administration nor the United Nations launched a war based on their suspicions. The Bush administration did, and the burden of proof rests on their shoulders.

The White House has recently admitted that a piece of evidence used in the State of the Union no less as proof of Iraq's nuclear weapons program is not credible. I am referring to the assertion that Iraq had attempted to purchase yellow cake uranium from Africa. The administration now says that the proof of that claim was not strong enough to merit inclusion in a Presidential speech.

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But, Mr. Speaker, the intelligence community knew at the time of the State of the Union that the Africa uranium story was not credible, which leaves us with two possibilities: either the administration knew the claim was bogus and chose to make it anyway, or critical intelligence information did not make it into the hands of the President or the dozens of people who wrote, reviewed, edited, or commented on the State of the Union.

Both of these possibilities are deeply disturbing.

This is not some small matter, as some would have us believe. The majority leader of this House the other day dismissed questions about the uranium issue, saying it is "very easy to pick one little flaw here and one little flaw there."

One little flaw? I could not disagree more. The specter of an Iraqi nuclear attack was cited as an important and compelling reason the United States launched a preemptive, nearly unilateral invasion that has led to the deaths of over 200 American soldiers.

On the path on war, the Congress and the American people deserve fact, not selective spin. We may have honest disagreements about how to respond to the threats posed by other countries, but we must have a credible assessment of what those threats really are.

More and more, it looks like we did not get that credible assessment.

And if the buildup to the war was flawed, its aftermath looks even worse.

Mr. Speaker, U.S. soldiers are being constantly attacked; dozens have been

killed since the President was flown onto the USS *Abraham Lincoln* and declared the war to be over.

It is becoming disturbingly clear that the administration did not have a coherent, workable plan in place to deal with the realities of post-war Iraq. Basic infrastructure, the economy, political and civil society, are all in bad shape. Worse, attacks against American soldiers appear to be growing in both intensity and coordination. And President Bush's response to these attacks? "Bring 'em on."

Well, I must say that I was deeply, deeply disturbed by such a cavalier comment. It does not take any courage for a President or a Member of Congress to say such a thing. We are not out there on the front lines, standing nervous guard in the searing heat, unable to distinguish friend from foe, with lousy food and no idea of when a reunion with loved ones will come.

These are some of the concerns that I share with a growing number of Americans.

One of my constituents from Worcester, Massachusetts, wrote, "Americans were made to feel that their lives were in immediate danger; yet months later, no weapons have been found. Americans do care. I did not take to the streets in protest during the war, because I wanted to believe that our government had substantial proof that it was vital for our security. I love my country, because I am allowed to ask these questions. Silence and apathy can also be dangerous to national security."

I believe it is time to get the United Nations and the international community more fully involved in the reconstruction process. We cannot do this by ourselves or with a small hand-picked group of others.

Mr. Speaker there is a lot at stake here. We need to get this right. We need to know the truth, and all of us, Democrats, Republicans, and Independents have a responsibility to pursue that truth. We have a responsibility to continue to ask tough questions and demand straight answers.

Thorough, bipartisan, and public investigations are in order. And I strongly support the creation of a select bipartisan commission to conduct those investigations and make the results known to the American people.

One final thing, Mr. Speaker. Never, ever again should we rush to war. This House had 1 day of debate on Iraq in October. One day. Congress did not ask the right questions. Congress did not demand the right proof. Our lack of thoughtful debate reflected very poorly on this institution; and today, Mr. Speaker, sadly, we are paying that price.

MEDICAL LIABILITY REFORM IN DANGER IN SENATE

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BOOZMAN). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Texas

(Mr. BURGESS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. BURGESS. Mr. Speaker, I rise this evening with great concern about a recent development that occurred yesterday here on the Hill. In the other body, the failure to close debate on medical liability reform, the most important legislation that this body passed in March, was to address this crisis; and now that reform is in danger.

The House passed H.R. 5 to control unsustainable medical liability premium increases and to preserve patient access to important medical specialists. Based on a 1975 California law, the Medical Injury Compensation Reform Act of 1975, that has held down premium increases in that State, H.R. 5 would place a cap on noneconomic damages in medical liability cases.

This bill would not limit access to the courthouse. This bill would not limit damages to those who have been injured by negligent actions. This bill would not reward bad doctors. This bill would not protect HMOs.

This bill will increase access to important specialists such as neurosurgeons, perinatologists, and trauma surgeons. This bill will return sanity to a legal system that currently resembles a Las Vegas gaming device.

This past March, back in north Texas, a Dallas neurosurgeon opened his mail and found a 5-figure premium increase in his medical liability insurance. He said, enough is enough, and he left town. This placed the entire trauma network in the Dallas-Fort Worth area on the brink of crisis. Again, good doctors driven from their practice by increasing liability premiums brought on by the trial attorneys.

This crisis is driving young doctors from practicing medicine or, in fact, it is keeping young adults from even considering medicine as a career, creating a potential physician deficit well into the future.

Mr. Speaker, this Congress needs to reform this system now, or surely it will collapse under its own weight. I am saddened by the intransigence of some Members in this town to not even consider this issue with seriousness and foresight.

Mr. Speaker, how could they do that? I hope that this Congress will confront this crisis with the seriousness that it deserves. Patients need relief. The country is asking us to lead. Let us do the right thing and send a medical liability reform bill to the President this year. He has already promised us that he would sign it. We should do nothing less.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. HOBSON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. HOBSON addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)